

## **The Dark Princess** by **inclclucy**

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**Summary:** I slowly take out her arm. It was a compulsive move that I would have regretted, and I'm shamefully sorry to be thankful that she does not have the energy to pull it back so instead she just looks at me unknowingly. She has the most beautiful eyes. Like my Sarah. I slowly pull up the cuff of the coat and shows her the tattoo. "Eleven... that's your name".

# 1. Chapter 1: Into The Woods

Hopper

Just when I thought everything will be over by the time I told Dr. Brenner where Eleven was, just to have a chance of getting Will back, here I am... driving into Mirkwood, alone, on a Christmas Eve.

Ever since that kid Will Byers vanished, my sequential and sometimes painfully boring days became those of making assumptions and taking chances. Not that I'm complaining though, however, the past month has been completely overwhelming, and the recurrent nightmares seem to remind me, that those adventures might have taken a toll on me-mentally. I'd be lucky to have 5 hours of sleep every night and I have even seriously considered leaving this town, but something always draws me back. Hawkins is my home now. I need it as much as it needs me.

Tonight is no different. I am trying to find someone, who, according to those guys at Hawkins lab, still exists. I wasn't there when it happened, but according to the kids, Eleven vanished into nothingness when she tried to destroy what they call the Demogorgon. They can call it anything they like, but for me, it's a monster which I prefer not to be named- a monster which I would like to be buried into the deepest part of my memory- or should I say, nightmares.

It has been a month since the incident at Hawkins Middle School, and this is exactly my 20th trip here. I go down my patrol car and walk slowly into the side of the forest.

It's freezing out here. *Damn, where is that child?*

I walk to my first stop and bend on my right knee to clear the snow covering the lid of the small crate that I have set up here after learning the news from Dr. Brenner's assistant that she is lurking in these woods. I open it and alas! It's empty, just like all the other times I have been here, this morning being the last...*which means she couldn't be far away.* I quickly glanced at my back and to my side. Nothing. I let out a big sigh. What's unfathomable for me is the fact

that she seems to not want to show herself. Why has she been hiding all this time? Why couldn't she just come out? Why doesn't she want us to help her?

I carefully laid down the bowl of food inside, and well, it's Christmas, so this time, I made sure to add some Eggos-a clever idea that I did not realize sooner. How could I forget that time when the kid ransacked the supermarket for these damn frozen waffles? If I have thought about it earlier, I would have lured the kid in sooner. *There you go. All set.*

So... how do I know that Eleven is indeed the one emptying this box? Well that's the thing... I don't.

Again, taking chances.

I am now preparing to do my usual routine before leaving- check the perimeter, look for clues, look for a twelve-year old girl, and call out her name. *"Eleven! Eleven! Where are you? Show yourself kid! I'm not gonna hurt you!"*

After scouring the whole forest, I become weary. *How long can I keep up with this?*

I walk back to my vehicle to leave and start to dig in my pockets for the keys and got nothing. *Shit*, I think I dropped them. I sprint back and start to look for them on the snowy ground when I heard a twig snap. *What's that?* It wasn't a sudden snap but rather a gentle and slow one. I swear it lingered on for about 3 seconds. I freeze on my tracks and I suddenly have the urge to check the box. It's impossible. *Could it be?* I start to open the box slowly. Half expecting... Half hoping... Eggos... GONE.

Panic is now rushing over me. *Is she here?* I flash the torch on my feet and start walking around the box when something catches my eye. A footprint. There, another one. One footprint becomes ten, twenty, then I saw a half-eaten Eggo on the ground. I hear metal clanking. *My keys.* I walk pass it and continue following the footprints and the sound and before I know it I am deeper down into the forest. Now what?

"Eleven! Are you here? I am your friend! That food you took? Eggos? I got more of that! I can give you as much as you like! I will take care of you, just come out!" *Just come out.*

I am going crazy. No, I must be crazy. But I shouldn't stop. Not now. I'll wait.

Twenty minutes pass by and I think I'm being played for a fool. I'm gonna let this pass, but I will be back...

Just when I start my way, I hear a rustling sound behind me. I turn around and see movement in a bush and to my horror, something starts to creep out. A hand. Dirty and bloody. It's a human, thank God. Then another hand. The creature slowly makes its way out, with its head down. It agonizingly stands up with its arms covering its face trying to shield it from the light. I lower my torch and I see dirty, bloody and horrendously pale and bare feet. I squint my eyes adjusting to the darkness around me while the human in front of me now has its arms down on the side. She is wearing what seems to be once green sweatpants with layers of oversized T-shirts covered with mud and blood. I slowly look up to see her face and I see a terror-stricken child. A girl so pallid and scrawny I swear I would do anything just to breathe some life into her. I slowly advance into her and she takes a step back.

"It's okay, I'm a friend." I said reassuringly. The girl puts her hand inside the pocket of her sweatpants and reveals my keys. She is shaking while she raises her arm to give them to me and I quickly start to take off my coat and hand it over to her. She drops the keys mid-air and I did the same with the coat. She slowly walks forward and weakly grabs the coat from the ground. I start to advance again. "Let me help you with that". She stops and looks at me. "I am a friend. My name is Jim. Jim Hopper." She starts to cry and my heart breaks. I start to move forward again and this time she does not flinch. I grab my keys and go beside her to help her with the coat-careful not to scare or alarm her. I am very much aware of the amount of casualties for the past month just to retrieve this child. I do not intend to be one of them.

*Take your time. There, there.*

I now step in front of her as she feels the warmth of the coat against her cold and frail body. She bends on her knees and starts sobbing. I did the same to try to make eye-contact with her and earn her trust. "Eleven"- I whisper. She looks up to me. "Please let me help you, Eleven. Come with me, I will take you somewhere safe. Away from the bad men."

She looks at me at a complete loss. "Wh-wh-who?"-she says, finally. *She must have forgotten about me.* Her voice was hoarse, and it reminded me of the voice I heard from my daughter Sarah when she woke up from a coma at the ICU.

"I'm Jim"-I say. She nodded but she still looks clueless as hell.

She starts to speak again and I try my best to completely shut down every single noise I can hear around me. "Wh-who's Eleven?"

*"Who's Eleven?"...You have got to be kidding me... You don't say...*

I try my best to take it in and that's when it hit me. Everything now starts to make sense. Now I understand why she had secluded herself. Why else would she be hiding in this horrific side of the town if she knows there would be friends willing to take her in? I can only imagine the horror that she went through for the past month. And just like that, I unconsciously made a vow to protect this pure child from the universe.

I slowly take out her arm. It was a compulsive move that I would have regretted, and I'm shamefully sorry to be thankful that she does not have the energy to pull it back so instead she just looks at me unknowingly. She has the most beautiful eyes. *Like my Sarah.* I slowly pull up the cuff of the coat and shows her the tattoo.

"Eleven... that's your name".

## 2. Chapter 2: Anything?

*First of all, thank you to those people who followed, faved and left reviews in this story. It is taking me longer than I have wanted to update this story. And for that, I apologize. I must say, this story is more on the serious side so I am trying to make the story and the characters as interesting as possible. I am very much excited about the part where the kids come in again but I find it very vital to introduce and develop some of the characters who would play a big part in the story first. We do not have an idea who would play Billy yet, but I am a big fan of Ezra Miller so I was thinking about him the whole time I was writing this. His aura and acting also perfectly matches Billy's demeanor in the story. Please give your honest feedback, I will take any criticism as this is the first time ever in my life sharing what I have written. For the love of Stranger Things!*

### Chapter 2: Anything?

#### Hopper

I quickly went to my house and grabbed as many stuff as I can- some clothes, food, medicine, money.... and what else? *Phone call.* I have to make a phone call.

"Hello, Flo?"- I said as soon as someone picked up the call, "Jim?", "Sorry to bother you but I just want to tell you that I don't think I can make it to work tomorrow, I mean, later. I'm sure all of you can handle everything at the station right?"

"Yes, sure! You deserve a rest Hop, and besides Powell and Callahan would be there they could be in charge tomorrow."

"Ok thank you, bye!"

"Jim wait!"... "Yes?"

"Someone called earlier looking for you and..."

I immediately interrupt her, "Yeah well about that... if anybody calls for me you know what to do Flo just tell them I'll call them back or I'm out on the field... please Flo you gotta figure it out..."

Just when I was about to put back the receiver I hear Flo shout.

"Hopper! It's family... It's Billy."

"Billy?"... "Jim?"...

"Jesus Christ, since when have you been there?"... "Just last night... Look, I wasn't stealing anything I was just... I was just looking for food in this leftover crate outside this diner and apparently they thought I was some homeless dude, much less a thief, so they called the cops and they found some weed in my jacket but I swear those weren't mine I wouldn't do that Jim you know me...."

"Yes I know you but what I don't know is what the fuck you're doing in Paxton?'... 'I'm trying to get to you, then these guys who gave me a hitch promised to bring me to Hawkins then dropped me off two towns far and took everything I had and just gave me that jacket instead so I had to fucking walk for fucking two weeks and well I guess that's how I got here."

"Then why didn't you call me since two weeks ago? And wait, why are you trying to go to Hawkins?"

...

"Mom died. She OD'd on heroin."

"What the... Are you fucking with me boy?!"

"Why would I lie about that? Is that how messed up you think I am? Unbelievable... There's no life for me in that city Jim. I need your help, so please could you just fucking get me out of here?"

"Not with that language Billy."

"Well you must have forgotten I've pretty much learned everything that comes out of my mouth from you right? I think my language should be the least of our worries now. "

**OUR** worries...

"Ok, then, goodbye Billy have fun in there"... "Wait, wait, WAIT!"

Jim... Uncle Jim, I'm sorry. Please... I'd do ANYTHING."

*Anything?* Anything. This is exactly what I need now. Someone who can do that. Someone who would do anything.

And just like that I came up with a not so brilliant idea. I might not have to flee Hawkins after all. If I can leave her in the hands of someone I trust... Someone who's got nothing to lose... Then I might be able to protect her AND Hawkins. As of now no one else seems to fit the bill but this kid. ***This has got to work.***

"Hello Jim? Hey, are you still there?"

"Yes... You said you'd do anything?"... "Well I don't have much of a choice do I?"

"Wait for me there. Now let me talk to the chief."

Time check: 1:15 AM. I still got plenty of time 'til sunrise. I carefully crossed the living room being especially vigilant of the killing machine sleeping on my couch. She makes a low hum every now and then but other than that, she's completely passed out. I lay the back of my hand on her forehead slowly. *The fever's gone.*

Now we need to get to Paxton.

**Billy**

"Ok now what?"... "You are to wait here for Chief Hopper... Here are some change for the vendo in the lobby, get yourself some food to eat."

I stand up and drag myself along the hall for a mere two meters before turning right to the lobby. I didn't seem to notice when I was brought here earlier but there are some Christmas lights surrounding the frame of the machine. I hate Christmas lights, overall I just hate Christmas. It makes me sad. It fucks me up inside and it gives me a feeling of loss over something I never even have or had, that is... It reminds me of the happiness of others. So it reminds me of my own grief, like, the gifts I couldn't have, stale bread and mushroom soup on a Christmas Eve, and most of all, an estranged mother whom I used to share it with. In my entire life I've only had one merry



Christmas. That was six years ago, and I was with Jim.

The blinking of the lights brought me back to my senses, and for a quick moment I almost admired them and my thoughts feel a little betrayed by my sentiment. Then, my stomach growls.

Well let's see... Oh why am I not surprised there's no actual food here? I glance at the officer who gave me the change earlier and give him a smirk. *Grab something to eat my ass.* He whispered something to the other officer in duty and they religiously laughed in chorus. I roll my eyes and slid the coin to the dispenser. Well then, soda it is.

There's a bench in front of the vending machine and I slowly eased into it while drinking my Coke. Not much of a comfort but at least it provides me a view of what's outside. I look to my left side and marvel at another reminder of why I hate this time of the year... Snow. A nasty precipitate. White, but nasty. I slowly turn my whole body to the side facing the main door now. I put my legs up on the bench and lean my head on the wall. And the last thing I remember is seeing a blur.

"Hey, kid. Hey, wake up, Billy!"... I quickly bolt upright at the sound of my name and I see Jim towering over me. The Paxton chief of police then struts to the lobby with a wide grin on his face.

"Chief Hopper, the famous Chief Jim Hopper... It's good to see you again, how are you doing?

"Getting by... Huh...Famous? Well, I guess you can call me a one hit wonder. No one in Hawkins really gives a damn about me anymore. I've stopped receiving cheese cakes and apple pies for a couple of weeks now..."

"Well at least you've got a taste of it, man. I mean, you were on TV and stuff... And the boy who lived. How'd you do that?"

"It's called CPR. Believe me, you wouldn't want to have gone through what I had just to get that child. Just be thankful this town isn't as creepy as it looks."

"Yeah... but how's the boy? You know a lot of rumors have been

reaching this town. They say someone kidnapped the kid and drugged the hell out of him which is why he keeps going in and out of the hospital. Some even say he's gone crazy and shit."

"Well it seems to me you haven't got tons of shit to do around here since you've got plenty of time gossiping around"

"Jeez hopper, I'm just saying something must have happened..."

"Nothing happened. Last time I checked- which was about two days ago, the boy is alive and healthy and that's the fact. Maybe its 'bout time you get shit done around this town, I don't know, maybe fixing some road signs and the lights down the bend? It took me more time to get here than I should have because the road on the way here looks like a freaking ghost town."

"Look we got your point hot shot, after what happened to Hawkins we figured we ought to fix those. I mean you can't be too careful right?"

Jim just nods at that last remark obviously feeling bored with this little exchange of pleasantries. I nod every now and then pretending not to feel invisible.

"Huh... well go ahead and be on your way then, just make sure this lad here won't come back round these parts tearing down other people's shit. People have become sensitive nowadays you know, after..."

"Yeah I know... Let's go kid."

....

After signing some papers, we FINALLY set off to wherever it is Jim intends to be. Back to Hawkins probably. As we head outside I didn't notice (I notice I haven't been noticing things lately) that Jim isn't wearing his uniform, and that he isn't driving a patrol car. I quickly braved the cold, thanks to the coat Jim handed to me earlier which smells like dust and cigar and quite surprisingly, it was homely.

He led me into a black Chevy pick-up with some kind of a bulky package at the back. He must have caught me looking so before we

go inside he begins to give me the lecture. Yes, right there, in the middle of the cold night. We could have gotten inside the vehicle first, but you know, this is Jim.

"Ok so we've got to lay out some rules. First, watch your language, I'm the only one allowed to cuss here. Second, don't talk about... HER, and third, don't ask questions."

"I am allowed to talk though right?"... "Yes but you are to shut the hell up if I told you to. Now go inside... And don't look at the back."

"Yeah, about that...What's-"... "I said no questions. GET... INSIDE..."- He says this with full authority and with clenched teeth. I can only muster a loud sigh as I go inside trying hard not to look at the mysterious package behind me. I can't figure out what it is but I know that if I ask another question and if he catches me checking it out again I will be kicked out in an instant so I start to build up all the patience and tried to push out all the curiosity out of me for my own survival.

Twenty minutes of silence have gone by and we passed through an old sign that says "Thank you for coming to Paxton" and on the opposite side there's another one that says, "Welcome to Hawkins".

*I knew it.* I begin to emotionally prepare myself for what's coming. New town, new life, maybe new friends, maybe Jim can even find a job for me to do. As I delude myself in this reverie, Jim suddenly blurts out-"You are not staying here in Hawkins."

**Ok...** I slowly nod to convey fake approval. *So much for daydreaming.* I wholeheartedly accepted that, much too quick for my own comfort. At this point in my life, I can just easily accept what the world throws at me. Or maybe, it's just because I trust Jim.

He must have sensed the impending depression of the young man on his passenger seat, so he decides to open his mouth again.

"You've changed... You're not the awkward and timid lad that I used to know. That's good. But what's up with the long curly hair?"... *Ok I'm not allowed to ask questions but he's allowed to somehow insult my personal anatomical preferences like how I groom my hair?!*

"Well I guess a lot has changed especially since...." *SHIT.*

Ever since my cousin Sarah died, Jim has completely shut his world off anything that connects him to her, including me. So, whatever the reason why he's with me now is definitely something of monumental significance. I can see the mortified look on his face so I decide to project the suffering to myself. It always works.

"I saw you on TV you know, that's actually one of the reasons why I decided to go here, I thought maybe you were doing fine now and you know... oh never mind, it's just that ever since Mom died, I don't know. The funny thing is, when she was still alive I've always wanted her to just die, so I can start living my own life, but then she did and I didn't realize that I got so used to my dark, wasted life, and I don't even know how to start."

"Billy, look man... I'm sorry about your mom."- He says sympathetically. *Ok I can't believe that actually worked.*

"I saw it coming, so don't be sorry. So where..." I am about to ask where we'd go but thankfully I was able to restrain myself. "I'm sorry. Rule number 3: No questions." I put up my thumb and index finger on my lips closing up the imaginary zipper of my big, insensitive mouth.

***Thank you for reading. So what do you think of Billy?***

***I might be able to publish Chapter 3 tomorrow and I promise the kids will finally be there. Thanks again!***

### 3. Chapter 3: Christmas Eve

#### Chapter 3: Christmas Eve

##### Will

I can feel it creeping up my throat again and I know I would have to make a lame excuse so my mom won't get too worried again. Washing my hands is the one thing I can think about now.

I go inside the washroom and cough it out and though it is not as painful as it was the first time, I still can't get used to the slimy feeling it leaves my mouth. I gargle and wash my face... *then it happens again...*

Everything around me turned dark and there's no mistake it's a vision of the Upside Down. I could never and will never get used to this. It terrorizes me every time. I have no idea if I'm having just a vision of it, or if I'm actually being transported back to that eerie, monstrous place...

Then just like that, *I am back.*

After our meal, I feel nauseous again and I rush to the bathroom, unable to make another excuse. I try to prepare myself for another slug. If it is, then this will be the first time ever that I would throw up two of those gross critters in a day. However, instead of what I was dreading the most, I just vomited my Christmas Eve meal, much to my satisfaction, but the bitter after-taste still sent my face to a sour and I have to brush my teeth twice.

"Are you okay Sweetie?"-my mom asks looking worried stiff as soon as I close the bathroom door. "Yes Mom, I'm fine, really. I just ate a lot, I guess."-I say with a faint smile to comfort her, and she starts to relax.

"Okay, well, you go on ahead and sleep now. I'll just fix everything around here while your brother does the dishes, okay?"-my mom says while giving me a hug and ruffling my hair.

"Okay."

I now turn to Jonathan who seems overly perturbed.

"Hey, you okay, Buddy?"-Jonathan says while putting on the apron. It's bright red with a huge print of Santa Claus and his reindeers, and though it doesn't match my brother's usual gloomy expression, I love that it gives him a little bit of color.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Merry Christmas, Mom, Jonathan. Goodnight!"-I say as I make a move towards my room.

"Goodnight, son."... "Goodnight, Will."-my brother says as he stares at me intently.

I lay on my bed and pull up the covers and I can't help but feel guilty. Ever since I was found, my life has never been the same. I always become a source of worry and I do not have the same kind of freedom I used to have. I can't stay out late without Jonathan, I can't be left alone at home. Somebody always has to tend to me and it's getting in the way of my family's normal life. Jonathan has always been the witness to my struggles, and has been my constant companion to the ER and to my medical check-ups. I was diagnosed with Acute Gastroenteritis once and with Amoebiasis just a week ago. Both of which does not require me to stay at the hospital but both were because of my excessive vomiting. I overheard the doctor once saying I have an abnormally high count of white blood cells and something about my platelet? *Whatever that means*. My mom just said it meant I have an infection.

One thing I can't understand though, is why I don't throw up those mean slugs outside- like EVER. It has been consistently happening once a day for four weeks now and it could be anytime in the day as long as I am here- at home. There must be a reason for that and I might need to tell someone about it sooner or later, but not now. In a week we will be back to school from our Winter break and I have yet to see if there will be any...changes... So as of now, not yet.

## **The Wheelers**

"So Mike, did you like your gifts?"-Karen asks while cutting the last

part of her steak. Her son, who is sitting across her on the table beside Nancy has been annoyingly quiet again, as what he'd always be the moment he's not with his friends anymore. Everyone in the table- her entire family, plus Steve, had been enthusiastically eating her well-prepared meal for the Christmas Eve, talking about their plans for the remainder of the holiday, except for Mike, who's completely oblivious to the fact that everybody's now staring at him.

"Mike?"-Karen asks again but this time half-shouting.

"Yeah, I like them... Thanks."-Mike answers while tossing the beans and mashed potatoes around his plate with his fork, his steak half-eaten.

"But you're barely touching your food Mike. Didn't you like it?"-Karen insists.

"No, I loved it. It was just... well, I'm not really hungry" -Mike replies with a blunt affect that seems to infuriate his mother.

This behavior has been going on for about a month now since that "incident", and while Nancy assures her that her son is undergoing some kind of grief, she can't help but feel that it has been going on for quite a long time already and she knows she has to intervene.

"Mike, if this is about...."-she was about to nag at Mike when Nancy suddenly interrupted her.

"Mom"-Nancy says calmly but staring at Karen with her eyes wide as if saying, *"Let him be"*.

"Karen, it's Christmas. Just cut the kid some slack. Mike, if you're done with your meal then you can go upstairs and get ready for bed"-Ted commands, and everyone is astounded at the sudden remark of the man who usually didn't care. However, Nancy totally got it and she motioned her head towards Steve to her mom and Karen now understands that Ted Wheeler is just unconsciously acting like the father that he should be in front of his daughter's boyfriend.

"Thanks Dad"-Mike says sounding genuinely thankful as he slowly gets up from his chair.

"Are you done now, Mike? Are you sure you don't want to have dessert? I baked your favorite cake."-Karen now sounding almost apologetic probably feeling guilty at her tone a moment earlier.

"No, thanks Mom."- Mike says while heading towards the basement...  
"Where are you going?"

"I'll head down the basement for a while...Umm... I'm just going to read some of my new comic books then I'll go to sleep."-Karen simply nods defeated by her affection towards the poor child as her husband slowly makes his way up from his chair.

"Oh, you too? Well, okay, can you bring Holly with you please?"

"Ok, goodnight kids. Merry Christmas. C'mon now Holly."-Mr. Wheeler says as she slowly lifts the sleepy girl from her high chair.

"Thank you Mr. Byers, Merry Christmas, Sir."-Steve says as he stands up deciding whether to shake the man's hand but then deciding not to, seeing that his girlfriend's father now got his hands full.

"Goodnight Sweetie, Daddy will tuck you in tonight okay?"- Karen says as she plants a kiss on little Holly's right cheek.

"Night Dad, Merry Christmas."-Nancy says not looking at his dad but instead, at Mrs. Wheeler.

"Mom, what was that about Mike? You know you have to let him be in times like these."-Nancy says as soon as her dad was out of earshot.

"Nancy, it's been a month! Sometimes I look at him and I feel like his mind is floating elsewhere. And what bothers me is that he doesn't act like that in front of his friends. When he's with us, he's just not Mike anymore. I don't even feel secure when he's alone, and I have to check on him multiple times every single night just to make sure he's not out and about trying to find that girl again."

"Mom, I understand you're frustrated but please give him more time, we told you every single thing that happened last time right? It's not easy to get over that. It's the same with all of us. It's just that he's-"

"He's way too attached to that girl Nancy. THAT's why. She's



probably dead by now and-

"MOM! Do NOT say that, if Mike hears you, then-

"Then what? Is that girl more important than us? His family?"-Karen's eyes are welling with tears now and Nancy suddenly felt ashamed of sticking to Mike's side, again.

"I don't know, Mom. But if you keep on doing that you'll turn him away. Let's just be glad knowing that he's safe. I check on him every night too, you know. It seems like they finally gave up on finding her." -Nancy says, the last sentence almost close to a whisper.

Smacking her lips, she asks the question she has constantly refrained herself from asking before because she just wants everything in the past to be laid down to rest. But she feels that that strategy is not viable anymore so she asks Nancy nonetheless.

"What was she like...? That girl?"-Nancy's face lit up upon hearing this. *Finally*-she thought.

"She has a name Mom. It's Eleven. El for short. I actually kinda like her."

"You only like her because she said you were pretty."-Steve says jokingly attempting to lighten up the conversation.

"What? No." Nancy grins and nudges him on his side with her elbow. "It's just... when we were at the school gym... at the bath... she was so scared yet she was so brave. She was the purest human being I have ever met, Mom. I remember how she clung to Mrs. Byers like a baby. It was a wonderful sight. Mrs. Byers would have been a wonderful mom to her if she was still... you know... if she didn't disappear."-Nancy chooses her words carefully just in case Mike suddenly decides to come up from the basement.

Steve, noticing the despondent look of the woman across the table then says, as buoyantly as he can, with a wide grin on his face, "You'd surely be a good mother to her too Mrs. Wheeler."-and he soon realizes how awkward his remark was when the atmosphere becomes silent. Mrs. Wheeler just started to become interested with Eleven, so

she probably isn't "thrilled" at the prospect of being her mother yet. Nancy rolls her eyes at Steve a little irritated with his boyfriend for being the insensible man that he is.

They stay like that for a couple of minutes then Karen stands up and asks, "Okay, who wants dessert?"

## **Mike**

It's been exactly a month now since El disappeared. Chief Hopper and Mrs. Byers told us everything that happened in Hawkins lab a few days after Will was discharged from the hospital. They said we "deserved" to know. The Hawkins Department of Energy is still up and running. Lucas, Dustin and I have made several trips there and in the woods trying to find El.

What we found one time was a small crate full of food and that was about the same time we were busted by none other than the "Chief" himself. We asked him about the crate and he said it was his doing.

*"So you were also trying to look for El"*- I said. "As a matter of fact, I do. You boys put your bikes on the back of my truck I'll send you all home"-he answered.

"Then why do you think you can find her by doing this? She's not some kind of a wild animal that you can lure out with some... sausages?"... I can feel the heat of anger and frustration rushing up my cheeks. "If you really want to find El you should go back to the lab!"

"Yes, we were thinking that when El disappeared, she wasn't just trying to kill the Demogorgon but was trying to close the gate down for good." Dustin joined in.

"She mentioned before that she was the one who opened the gate. If she was the only one powerful enough to open the gate to the Upside Down, that means she's the only one who can close it down.", Lucas added.

Dustin then rejoined saying, "When she opened the gate, she was in the lab- the Upper dimension, so if she needs to close the gate, this

time, she has to be in the Upside Down. She didn't really die but she actually teleported the Demogorgon and herself to the other dimension, and now we need to know if she really closed it down because if not, she could be stuck there and we have to help her."

"Or, she could have made another portal and gone here to the woods. We cannot stop looking for her. Every single day matters."

I sounded desperate that time but it didn't matter, we all were.

"The gate to the Upside Down in Hawkins lab was closed, so there's no reason for you to go lurking around here because it's not safe."- Chief Hopper reveals.

"How did you know that?" I asked.

"How did I know what?"... "That the gate to the Upside Down was closed?"-I answered.

"You do not need to know"...

"Liar... If you know that the gate was closed then you wouldn't go around looking for her here too... You'd probably going to sell her out again just like last time!"... I was shocked with my own words but I was furious.

"You know I did THAT to save Will... Now your parents will know all about this and you will promise not to go back here or the lab because all of you know very damn well that if that gate wasn't really closed at all and if that monster wasn't destroyed... then any or all of you could end up being stuck in that Upside Down"...

I was just staring at the chief but I knew that Dustin and Lucas were exchanging glances.

"You think this is some kind of adventure? Did you see Will's mom when his son was missing? Everybody thought she was crazy! Do you really want to do that to your families? Huh?"

"Mike, I think we need to go home now."- Lucas said, obviously defeated by the chief's words.

"Well I'm not going home with you."- I said to the chief as I jumped on my bike and rushed on the way home. I heard them shouting after me, but in my heart I know there's only one person I would give everything to hear say my name.

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We were all grounded for a week after that. I mostly spent that week just working on the campaign for tonight's game of Dungeons and Dragons. Now, I'm alone here, inside the fort that I especially made for her when she was still around. I would have to make some changes here when she comes back. Or maybe I can really just stay here and she can have my room like what I said to her last time. It puts a smile on my face just thinking about it but then I quickly realize that I am here, and she's not, and all I could think about is how worthless I am as a friend.

I even made promises to her that night. *What was I thinking? Oh, El. Wherever you are now, just stay alive. We're coming for you. We will never give up.*

Next week will be the start of school again after Winter break. And by then, our search will continue. But this time, we will be more careful. This time, we will find her.

## 4. Chapter 4: The Guardian

Hopper, Billy and Eleven checks-in at an inn where Hopper finally tells Billy everything about the girl. The truth sent the young man to a shock but soon finds the will to protect the child. Eleven gains a new name and a new guardian to keep her safe.

### Chapter 4: The Guardian

"Wake up, we're here"-the chief announced while giving a single tap to Billy's chest with his right hand, sending his nephew to wake abruptly, close to hysteria. He just stared at his uncle annoyingly, not uttering a word when he heard something moan behind him.

"Mmmm..." He looked at the back of the pick-up to find something moving. A part of it moving up and down. He heard the sound of breathing.

"Ok what is that? Or should I say *WHO* is that?"

Hopper just stared at him, and with a disturbingly serious tone said, "You promised you'd do anything if I get you out of there right?"

"I promised? Ok yeah maybe but-"

"No buts... Just go down right now, grab the back door and act like a normal city kid and let me do the talking when we head inside. Do you understand?"

Billy simply nodded and went out into the dark parking lot holding the back door while watching Jim carry out a child covered in a plain brown flannel blanket. Billy saw that the kid's head was shaved and if he didn't hear him making a sound earlier he might have thought that he was dead. He was terrified but still followed Jim, who was carrying the unconscious child like a baby inside the inn.

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"Paxton Roadside Inn, good evening, or should I say good morning... I'm Lorie, How can I... help you?"

"Hi good morning, we're on our way home but it looks like there's a storm coming so I just figured we'd make a stop until maybe in the afternoon... We'll get a twin room please."

"Ok. Well, do you need an extra bed for the.....kid?"-Lorie said while nodding, eyeing the child sleeping on the big man's arms.

"No need, we won't stay long anyway." - Jim replied with a helpless smile.

"Sure. Now I'm just going to need some of your details." The receptionist was about to give a form for Billy to fill-out but Jim quickly interjected.

"Sure, you can just write it down for me please. My name's Carl... Carl Porter, we're from New York."

"Ok... Mr. Porter from New York"- Lorie withdrew the form and wrote the details herself. "-and you are staying with... your two boys, I suppose?"

"Yes, my sons Bill and..." Jim contemplated on the name he should give Eleven but the first thing that came to his mind was the rerun of the 1979 Mel Gibson film that he caught a glimpse of earlier at Paxton Police Station. "...Max. Look, my sons are really tired and my youngest here is sick, so how long do you think it will be until the room's ready? I'll come back here as soon as we're settled so I can give you the other details"

"Oh...I see, well, would you need a doctor?"... "Um, no it's just a fever."

"Well, you can go there now, Brian here will be assisting you."

## **Billy**

Jim carefully lays the boy down on the bed situated at the far end of the room. Questions keep boggling my mind right now but I know I would have to wait for the perfect time. Jim touches the forehead of the child and stares at him for a couple of seconds and wait... *Did he just smile?* Must be my imagination. He starts towards the door walking past me and and says, "I'll go back outside and get my things

from the pick-up and talk to that receptionist Lucy"... "Lorie"-I corrected. "Whatever."-He lets out a loud sigh and looks at me while opening the door. "Just stay here and be quiet."-he warns. *As if I'd go anywhere.*

"Wait, what will I do if he wakes up?" With that he closes the door again, walks towards me and puts both of his hands on my shoulders. "If the kid wakes up...HIDE."

*Hide? What the fuck? What is going on here?*

I wasn't able to react to that and before I know it, Jim is out of the room. I turn around and run my fingers through my unkempt curly hair - which I usually do when I'm stressed.

I try to relax by observing everything around me. *If I really need to hide then at least I have to know where.* It is a pretty decent accommodation actually. It's well-lit and the walls are lined with mahogany wood panels. The furniture are warm and rustic. Two single beds line up each other, it has its own bath and a small table with two chairs beside the door. The clock on the wall says 4:00. I slowly sit down at the other bed which stands a few feet away from the other. I observe the kid who's still sleeping soundly. The kid looks feminine, definitely malnourished. Something from his wrist catches my attention. *Is that a tattoo?* It says 011. *Eleven?*

The boy moved his head a little and I almost jump but somehow manage to restrain myself when I see a small smile come from the corner of the child's lips. *Sigh.* Sarah used to be like this back when I used to watch her in her sleep at the hospital. Her mom said she was probably having a good dream. I wonder what this kid is dreaming about. Without knowing it, I also give out a faint smile. *So why did Jim ask me to hide if this kid wakes up?* That I do not want to find out.

Jim slowly enters the room after 15 minutes and as soon as he's settled in I calmly confront him. We're both standing by the door since we want to be as far from the kid as possible, so as not to awake him.

"Ok so since where are you a Mr. Porter, and since when was I your son let alone a brother to this kid?

"I would want you to shut the hell up kid. I had no sleep but I would stand guard first so you go ahead and get yours."

"Did you kidnap him? Is this some part of a covert operation you're trying to accomplish? Are you with the CIA now?"- I demanded. Not getting any answer, I continue with my query... "Wait, is he really your son? I mean this kid looks old enough to be the same age as"... Not letting me finish my last statement, Jim grabs me by the collar and pushes me against the wall...

"TRY ME"... I can feel the hotness of his breath against my cold face. His pupils were fully dilated like that of a predator whose about to leap on a prey. I crossed the line so I deserve this. I prepare myself to be slapped or maybe punched in the gut or worst, being thrown out... but he lets go when he saw the anguish on my face. I saw him like this before, and I know I do not want to mess with him.

"Get yourself some sleep. I'll tell you everything you need to know about her later...before she wakes up."

"You are in deep shit right now, aren't you?"-I say as I try to straighten up my shirt, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Well I guess you are now, too."

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"How long has that kid been sleeping?"-I say as I slowly sit down on the dining chair. We've had breakfast an hour ago and now Jim has summoned me from the bed. I guess this is when he tells me everything. The suspense and fear of the unknown is killing me.

"Her name is Eleven."

"Her?" *I knew it. Eleven. The tattoo.*

"Yes. She's a girl... and she's special."

"How special?"

"Look, what I'm about to tell you are things that you may find unbelievable. I want you to open your mind and just let me finish



saying everything, okay?

"Okay..." *Fuck just get on with it already!*

Jim starts to relay the story from the beginning...

***Missing kid... Mirkwood... Hawkins Lab... MK Ultra... a certain Dr. Brenn...er?... Eleven... Telekinesis... Three boys... Upside Down... DEMOGORGON...***

I completely spaced out after hearing all of them. I am dumbfounded and I slowly look back to the girl sleeping on the bed.

"What's the matter kid? Ran out of things to say now, eh?"

I slowly look back to my uncle, still in shock. I can't seem to find the right words to say even if I want to say something.

"Well you do realize that every single thing you just said to me is just really hard to process, right? It's so incomprehensible I think I might have lost any logical thought to actually say something that makes sense...I am not making any sense now am I?"

"Well then you're free to ask questions now because I'm lifting rule number three and I'm replacing it with a new one: **You can never tell anyone.** Billy, this is gravely important. I'm talking about a life-and-death situation here. Once they found out I've successfully extracted Eleven they'd be after me like hawks and they'd stop at nothing. You both have to stay away from Hawkins and keep her safe. I'm thinking New York. You'll both start a new life you will be his brother you will keep her safe the best way you can and you don't have to worry about money I'd get you covered. It's that simple."

"No its not. I can't be somebody's guardian I can barely take care of myself! Why can't you just stay with us?"

"Didn't you listen to me? I can't do that 'cause if I do then they'd suspect I already got her and that I tried to flee with her. Then that would be a breach of our contract which means they get to sabotage the lives of those boys who helped THIS kid. They'd milk their families dry until they can get all the information they need to get Eleven."

"Well why did you even have to sign that contract anyway!?"

"I HAD to if I wanted to save the boy from that place." *The Upside Down*

"So... that's why... you sold this kid out and now you're guilty as fuck and you wanna try to save her life? You want to be a knight to this... dark... princess."

"This is not about me."

"Wait... you said something about the kid not remembering anything though right? What if she completely forgot about everything...like, what if her memory was completely wiped out? Then that would mean she also lost her memory of all the things that she can do with her mind right? She wouldn't be able to use her powers then, and she'd be completely useless to that doctor, then, she's free to go."

"We don't know that for sure. As far as I can remember, she can still do those things. She killed a dozen of Brenner's men before I got her, but she probably didn't even know she was the one killing them, or maybe yes but I'm not certain of that yet... And even if she forgets now, how can we make sure she won't remember?"

"So we have to wait for her to wake up to know that right? Well what if she wakes up then go crazy and kill us both? Haven't you thought about that?"

"As a matter of fact I haven't."

"Well, that's fucked up! So what's the plan?"

"First of all, you keep your voice down because if you wake her up and freak her out then we can both say goodbye to our pathetic and miserable lives."

I put my hands on the table with my palms on my face. *Am I really doing this? If I will be doing this then why? Why would I risk my life for this girl?*

"I need to get some air"-I say as I stand up from my chair, my knees wobbly and my mind drained. Jim gives me a stern look and I know

he's thinking I would run away. I would like to but I can't. Why? I don't know.

"She would need something to eat when she wakes up so maybe I can get something for her downstairs... Look I'm not going anywhere trust me. I have nowhere to go remember? Plus I reckon when she wakes up she wouldn't want to see another face other than yours right?"

He nods and gives me some cash. He looks defeated and miserable.

"Uncle Jim, why are you doing this?" I need to know why so maybe I can also convince myself.

"She reminds me of her... from the very first time I saw her she reminded me of...of..."

"Say it. Uncle Jim, just say her name, please...."

"Of Sarah"...

Both of us weren't able to help Sarah before. We couldn't lessen her pain. We couldn't make her feel beautiful when her hair started to fall. We couldn't tell her she wouldn't die, and couldn't save her when she did. I now see my uncle's reason. And I think I also found mine.

"I'll stay outside when I get back. Just call me when this kid is ready to meet her guardian." –I say to Jim with a genuine smile. He nods and gives me a smile back. It feels good to hear him say her name again, after so many years. And that's because of Eleven. We will protect her at all cost.

"All right, then."

"Billy..."

"Yes?"

"Thank you. And you might wanna buy some Eggos."

**Thank you for your patience in reading this story. This isn't quite picking up the pace yet but I'm also just taking my time. I**

loved writing this and I am writing a lot of drafts now especially about the Mike and Eleven reunion. It's going to be so cringe and stuff but I love Mileven so... Next chapter, Eleven will wake up. Will it be a disaster? Will she remember anything? Stay tuned peeps! XOXO -Lucy